

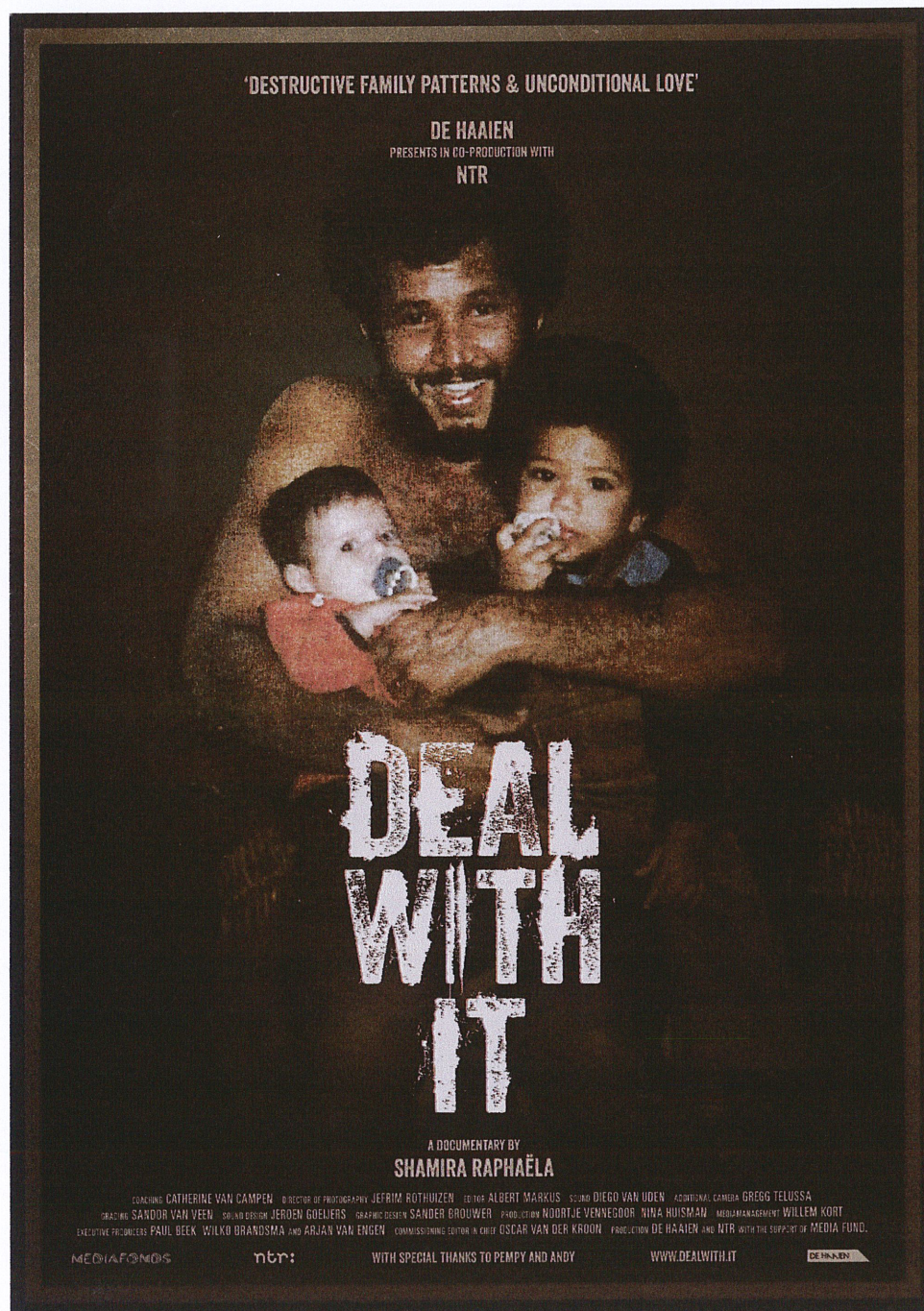
Shadow and Act

On Cinema Of The African Diaspora

Indiewire

Aruba Film Festival Review: 'Deal With It' Is a Compelling Documentary About Cycles, Addiction & the Power of Love

By [Aramide A Tinubu](#) | Shadow and Act October 14, 2015



Deal With It

Living in New York City, I've learned to avoid the drug users as they bellow loudly down the streets of Harlem. I avoid making eye contact with them, seemingly more absorbed in whatever's on my phone screen or streaming through my ear buds than the human beings right in front of me. They're forgotten to me by the time I make it to the next block. If criminals and addicts aren't directly involved in your life, you rarely actually see them. Instead, we use them for our entertainment (and maybe education) on shows like HBO's "The Wire" and Starz's "Power". Or, we might turn on the television some dreary afternoon to a show like "Intervention".

We sit and observe, maybe even sympathetically, from the comfort of our own lives, watching their lives quickly spiral out of control. But, what if we didn't have that luxury? There are many people who deal with addiction and criminalization on a daily basis that they can't escape because love and family is wholly inescapable. What if you have no choice but to deal?

Aruban-Dutch filmmaker, Shamiera Raphaëla, explores this topic in her mesmerizing and compelling freshman documentary "Deal With It". The film follows her 60-year old drug dealing and heroin addicted father Pempy, as well as her brother Andy, who are both constantly in and out of prison. The film opens with Pempy's release from jail. As soon as he steps beyond the prison gates, he starts talking smack. His lifestyle has obviously taken a toll on him, but his spirit is still vibrant. He's hilarious and upbeat; one of his most prized possessions is a massive Tupac poster hanging on his apartment wall. If you thought 60-year-old drug dealers didn't exist, then you've never met Pempy.

Raphaëla's brother Andy's story is much harder to swallow. As a Caribbean man (who is much darker skinned than his sister or father) living in Holland, the cycle and repercussions of Pempy's choices on Andy's life are staggering. Though, Andy isn't an addict in the way that Pempy is, he sells drugs and makes a living by robbing others. In one particular scene, he rolls crack rocks as his infant son looks on from his stroller.

Shamira Raphaëla is nearly 33 years old, so these are images she has been seeing all of her life. Still, it's truly shocking to watch what we can only assume are typical interactions with her father. Pempy cooks heroin on a spoon, while Raphaëla tries to discuss his use of crack, heroin, and meth on the same day. Yet, Pempy isn't fazed. He flips the script on Raphaëla suggesting that she be more concerned with her biological clock and lack of boyfriend. This moment, like many others in the film, is hilariously heartbreaking.

The film is poignant because it allows Pempy and Andy to be exactly who they are. They are deeply flawed men of course, but they are living on their own terms, outside of societal constraints. Though Raphaëla is obviously frustrated by her family's behavior, she takes them as they are. She does not waste energy forcing them to listen to long spiels or suggesting rehab. The father and son seem content (for the moment) with the circumstances of their lives, and she loves them despite it all.

"Deal With It" is crushingly honest. Andy uses his son's stroller in order to steal groceries, and we listen for Pempy's almost constant humming of Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds." It's moments like these that suck in the audience. Andy and Pempy demand to be seen, regardless of whether their lifestyle is outside of what's accepted in society. "Deal With It" is an understated and touching film about finding love in unpleasant places.

Watch the trailer for “Deal With It Below”.

Aramide A Tinubu has her Master's in Film Studies from Columbia University. She wrote her thesis on Black Girlhood and Parental Loss in Contemporary Black American Cinema. She's a cinephile, bookworm, blogger, and NYU + Columbia University alum. You can read her blog at: www.chocolategirlinthecity.com or tweet her @midnightrami

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